

What Mentors Want – A Guide to Really Supporting your Mentors

We all know that mentors are the lifeblood of youth mentoring programs. Without their passion and perseverance young people would not have the opportunity to grow and develop through mentoring relationships.

But how do we support our mentors to keep them involved and energetic so that they can keep on mentoring?

As part of Youth Mentoring Week 2008 a group of mentors from across Victoria came together to share what they love about mentoring, what makes them feel supported and ways they can further promote youth mentoring in their community.

This guide is a culmination of their views and provides coordinators with a real insight into 'What Mentors Want.'

What do mentors love about being involved?

- Having a real and genuine relationship
- Knowing that they are making a difference
- Celebrating at group events with other mentors and young people
- Testing their boundaries and getting outside their comfort zone
- Being appreciated by the young person and their family
- Having a young person put up their hand and ask for help
- Seeing the difference mentoring can make, even if it takes time
- Teaching & modelling simple things like how to order in a café
- Having conversations about things like respect and what it means
- Hearing the young person describe the relationship and what it means to them
- Getting just as much out of the relationship as the young person

Mentors say...

"The highlight for me is knowing I've made a positive difference. I have a lovely new friend. I feel more connected and have a greater sense of belonging to my community. I also feel I've done something to improve the profile and the image of young people in my community."

"You can see that you are making the connection and having an impact."

"My refugee young person has finished the program and now enjoys employment and a stable life. She now assists in training – sharing her story with new mentors and young peoples."

"My children have left home and my grandkids don't need much from me. So I wanted to recreate an extended family for myself and for a young person. It's important to me to pass on my experience. I think families are less able to offer practical care and experiences to their children, down-to-earth care that money can't buy. My young person was withdrawn, hiding under her hair. She's really opened up."

"I love watching her learn to make decisions for herself, to see the self-confidence growing."

“Seeing him grow and change and start to get involved in some things has been amazing. He’s been very closed, like a vault. He texted me at eleven one night to tell me his mum had had a baby. The fact that he keeps coming back is important, even though he still doesn’t say much. His single parent mum says she can see a difference.”

“My mentee is talking more and more to me about her personal issues. We share our interest in animals and that seemed to spark a vision in her for the future. It’s nice to see her develop.”

“It’s amazing seeing young people who are falling through the cracks with serious problems turn their lives around.”

“Being invited to go to her deb ball was a great highlight for me. Her single mum appreciates the fact that I’m there and that I do things with her. A highlight was meeting her at McDonalds (the mentor’s program is school contact limited) and seeing the effort she’d made to look good, to be part of an ‘adult’ meeting.”

“It was gradual steps and was a real achievement.”

“Mentoring is a window to a world I would never get to see.”

What Support do Mentors want?

Clear expectations about the role and thorough training

- Clear and consistent expectations about the role of ‘mentor’
- Comprehensive initial training that ensures mentors feel prepared
- An appropriate and well thought out match
- An orientation process for young people
- Some idea of who the young person is before they meet

One on one support from the Coordinator

A coordinator who:

- fully supports an introduction to a young person
- provides greater support during the initial stages of the match
- knows the mentor and young person well
- ensures they have regular one on one contact with the mentor
- checks in on the mentor at least every 2-3 weeks
- has an open and honest relationship with the mentor
- is flexible about both phone and face-to-face contact
- helps track down a young person when they go missing
- can suggest courses of action and solutions to issues
- is consistent as continuity of relationship is important
- is available - or provides a back up if they are not available
- ensures there is after hours support for crisis situations
- goes the extra mile to help the relationship succeed

Professional Development Opportunities

- Ongoing skills and knowledge development
- New and interesting ongoing training to keep mentors coming
- Mindfulness regarding the time commitment of training on top of seeing the

young person

- See the 'Support with' section below for ideas about training topics

Access to Extra Events and Activities

- Group activities or functions for both mentors and young people to attend
- Access to activities that can otherwise be difficult or expensive for mentors to arrange
- Occasional financial assistance with activities
- Free tickets and passes to special events

Networking and Group Debriefing

Formal and informal get togethers to enable mentors to network and debrief their experiences:

- Enable mentors to share stories and normalise their experiences
- Provide an opportunity for new mentors to learn from more experienced mentors
- Enable mentors to learn strategies from each other
- Hold social events just for mentors (eg dinner, bowling)
- Set up a buddy system to link new with experienced mentors
- Don't forget to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of mentors and young people

Recognition and Celebration Events

- Ensure mentors feel valued by the program and organisation
- Encourage a sense of belonging and inclusion
- Hold formal celebration events to thank mentors
- Give certificates and/ or match anniversary gifts to mentors (and young people)
- Celebrate the match by holding a graduation event
- Give young people a chance to say 'thank you' (eg through a card or making dinner for mentors)

Support with:

- Dealing with first meetings
- The best way to communicate with young people
- Getting to know the young person and getting them to open up
- Easing anxiety and pressure to uphold conversations
- Ensuring the young person's family is supportive of their involvement
- Dealing with the young person's other relationships and family
- Working with young people who push boundaries
- Neutralising problem behaviour
- Being clear about the role of mentor and being able to say 'no'
- Being flexible, while setting limits with a young person
- Knowledge about what pushes buttons for Generation Y
- Understanding trauma and other psychological issues
- Avoiding falling back into being a teacher, counsellor or parent
- Teaching the young person to be more responsible and not letting them get away with excuses
- Communicating effectively with a stressed or angry young person
- Encouraging good self esteem in a young person
- Supporting a young people when they are refusing assistance

- Sitting with a young person during the tough times
- What to do when you see disaster looming
- Responding to concerning disclosures
- Dealing with a crisis situation
- When to keep secrets for a young person
- Self care and avoiding burn out when the match is struggling
- Working within other institutions (eg schools, youth justice centres, government departments)
- Keeping the relationship going in transitional period (eg leaving school)
- Having realistic expectations about the relationship
- Being persistent and resilient when things don't go to plan
- Limiting the financial cost of activities
- Transport, especially in rural programs

Thank you to the mentors and workers who contributed to this Guide:

- Adam Clarke - Drive On Ballarat
- April Livesley-Clarke - Lead On Ballarat
- Bob Agnew - Big Brothers Big Sisters Melbourne
- Bon Hardy - Red Cross - Echuca College
- Brian Harlow - ECHO
- Bronwyn Jane Downes - Whitelion
- Cathie Christie - Tertiary Mentoring Program - The Smith Family
- Clare Griffin - Whitelion
- Damien Becker - Brophy Family & Youth Services
- Daria Sayakhot - Big Brothers Big Sisters Melbourne
- David Mere - Whitelion
- Dinah Pitman - Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services
- Enda Katchew Gage - Refugee and CALD Youth Mentoring Program
- Jill Simpson - Berry Street - Morwell
- John Hermens - Trafalgar Youth Resource Centre
- Judith Broome - Bayside Youth Mentoring Program
- Karen Crawford - ECHO
- Kate Boyer - Gippsland Mentoring Alliance
- Kate Story - Brimbank Youth Services YMCA - BBBS
- Kathryn Hamill - Southern Grampians Adult Education
- Katrina Black - Berry Street - Morwell
- Larissa Walker - Berry Street - Morwell
- Leigh Candy - St Luke's Anglicare
- Lyn Simmons - Berry Street - Morwell
- Marie Hardy - Red Cross - Echuca College
- Mark Jenkins - Whitelion
- Megan Ford - Stride Foundation
- Nadia Insall - Corryong Neighbourhood House
- Nicola Morris - YWCA Victoria
- Patsy Daly - Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services
- Peter Maw - LYPET - RMIT University
- Petrina Hare - Barwon Youth
- Sally Pannifex - Stride Foundation
- Sam Joukadjian - Inner Eastern LLEN
- Sue O'Neal - Trafalgar Youth Resource Centre
- Sue Watts - NESAY, Wangaratta

Thanks also to the Youth Mentoring Network, the Office for Youth's 'Mentoring and Capacity Building Initiative' and the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust for supporting this event.